

**Christmas Eve,
December 24, 2022.**

Scripture context:

Isaiah 9:2-7;

Psalm 96;

Titus 2:11-14;

Luke 2:1-20.

Hymns:

Entrance hymn 83, – O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant.

Sequence hymn 98 – Unto us a boy is born! The King of all creation.

Offertory hymn 87 – Hark! The herald angels sing glory to the newborn king.

Communion hymn 89 – It came upon a midnight clear, that glorious song of old.

Second communion hymn 111 – Silent night, Holy Night.

Closing hymn 100 – Joy to the world.

YOU AND I LIKE THE PROPHETIC PREACHERS EACH OF US IS AND WE ALL ARE TOGETHER, WE TOGETHER HAVE SUMMONED –WHOOPS! LET ME TAKE THAT PAST TENSE VERB BACK, WE HAVE NOT SUMMONED....THAT IS NOT HOW GOD ACTS! IN GOD’S NAME WE HAVE INVITED US AND THE WORLD TO THIS GATHERING TONIGHT. WHERE WE CELEBRATE GOD’S PRESENCE AMONG US IN THE MOST VULNERABLE AND HUMBLE OF WAYS. WE INVITED BY SINGING THAT WONDERFUL IMPERATIVE PHRASE “O COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL.”

WELL WHO IS THE GROUP CALLED “YE FAITHFUL.” THE HYMN’S INTENT IS THAT WE RECOGNISE GOD IS REACHING OUT TO ALL OF US AND TO ALL CREATION. AND IS BESTOWING ON YOU AND ME THE LABEL “YE FAITHFUL.” SOME MIGHT REACT, “I’M ONLY HERE TO PLEASE MY MOTHER WHILE I VISIT. I HARDLY QUALIFY FOR THE LABEL

“YE FAITHFUL.” AND AFTER ALL, WHAT IS IT TO BE FULL OF FAITH?

FAITH IS TANTAMOUNT TO TRUST. I’M HERE BECAUSE I TRUST THE GOD MY MOTHER WORSHIPS NOT TO HARM HER THEREFORE MAYBE THIS GOD, MAYBE SHE WILL NOT HARM ME EITHER.

DID I JUST SLIP? SHE AS A PRONOUN FOR GOD? A CANADIAN LITURGICAL SCHOLAR NAMED BARBARA MITCHELL TOLD THE STORY OF GROWING UP UNABLE TO PRAY TO GOD BECAUSE GOD WAS ALWAYS HE AND HIM. HER BIOLOGICAL FATHER HAD BEEN ABUSIVE TO HER AS A CHILD AND SHE SIMPLY COULD NOT PRAY TO FATHER GOD. UNTIL HER SPIRITUAL COUNSELLOR ADVISED HER TO ASK GOD. GOD, MAY I SOMETIMES CALL YOU SHE OR HER OR MOTHER OR GRANDMOTHER? AND GOD GAVE BARBARA PERMISSION.

SHE WAS NOT THE FIRST. JULIAN OF NORWICH IN THE 1300’S SPOKE OF GOD AS OUR TRUE MOTHER, AND OF JESUS AS OUR MOTHER TOO. TWO CENTURIES EARLIER ANSELM, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY WHO DIED IN 1209, SAID CHRIST CHOSE TO BE OUR MOTHER IN ALL THINGS.

THIS CHRISTMAS MAY BE A TIME TO KNOW GOD’S PRESENCE IN SOME FRESH AND NEW WAYS. AND FOR GOD TO BE SURPRISED AND DELIGHTED IN YOU AND ME AS WE PRESENT OURSELVES IN NEW WAYS.

BUT BACK TO WHY AND HOW WE ARE HERE TONIGHT. SOME OF US MAY PREFER TO REMAIN DOUBT. AFTER ALL, “I’M HERE ONLY BECAUSE MY MOTHER THINKS I SHOULD BE WELL, IF MOTHER THINKS I SHOULD BE HERE, THAT IS ANOTHER WAY GOD REACHES OUT TO BE WITH ME. TO INCLUDE ME INTO KNOWING GOD’S PRESENCE IN ALL THINGS.

BY THE TIME OF JESUS IN THIS TINY SLICE OF HUMAN HISTORY WE CALL NEW TESTAMENT TIMES, 2200 YEARS AGO, SOME KIND OF INTERVENTION WAS DESPERATELY NEEDED. IT WAS A TIME NOT SO UNLIKE OURS WHERE HUMAN GREED TO OWN MORE AND GUARANTEE MY SECURITY MEANT I HAD TO CONTROL AND POSSESS POWER OVER OTHERS. IT WAS A POWER WHERE THOSE UNDER COLONIAL DOMINATION WERE TAXED TO DEATH BY THE ROMAN AUTHORITIES SO THAT THE AUTHORITIES COULD BECOME RICHER AT THE EXPENSE OF PEASANT FARMERS. WE SEE MUCH THE SAME IN OUR WORLD TODAY.

BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE IN THE WIDER WORLD THAT WE SEE IT. WE MAY HAVE LIVED DISCOURAGED WITH OURSELVES BECAUSE WE HAVE STRUGGLED TO FEEL WORTH WHILE SEEKING POWER OVER OTHERS IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS OR IN OUR WORK AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES. IT IS NOT A HAPPY JOYFUL FEELING EVEN WHEN THE PERSONAL POWER IS IN OUR HANDS LEAVING US IN CHARGE AND KNOWING IT ALL.

IT WAS INTO A WORLD RIFE WITH SUCH TURMOIL IN PERSONAL AND NATIONAL AND POLITICAL, EVEN IN RELIGIOUS LIFE. GOD DECIDED THE NEED OF THAT WORLD WAS SO GREAT THAT GOD DESIRED TO BE ONE OF US. JESUS EXPERIENCED THE WARMTH AND NOURISHMENT OF HIS MOTHER'S WOMB, AND WAS BORN IN WHAT WAS THEIR HOMELESS SHELTER THAT NIGHT. SIGNIFICANCE AND MEANING FILLED THE WHOLE ATMOSPHERE THAT LUKE REPORTS THE SINGING OF ANGELS REJOICING IN GOD'S LOVE FOR THIS LITTLE PORTION OF GOD'S CREATION. AND FOR THE MANNER OF GOD SHOWING GOD'S LOVE. AFTER ALL, GOD COULD SIMPLY HAVE EQUIPPED THE MARY AND JOSEPH'S HOUSEHOLD, DESCENDANTS OF KING DAVID IN POWER A MILLENNIUM EARLIER, HEREBY RESTORED TO

POLITICAL AND MILITARY AND FINANCIAL POWER. BUT NO! WHAT THE ANGELS REJOICE IN AND THE SHEPHERDS MARVEL AT IS THE HUMILITY OF GOD. GOD REJOICING IN BEING A HELPLESS VULNERABLE INFANT DEPENDENT ON OUR HUMAN CARE AND REJOICING IN IT.

HOW BETTER TO LIVE OUT GOD'S DESIRE TO BE WITH US THAN TO BE BORN A HUMAN HELPLESS INFANT. A HELPLESS INFANT WHO WAS ALSO ONE WITH OUR HOMELESS....LIKE ASYLUM SEEKERS ON THE BORDER OR IN EL PASO RIGHT NOW WITH NO SHELTER. TO BE BORN TO ONE OF THEM, HAVING KNOWN THE NINE MONTH WARM HOSPITALITY OF MARY'S WOMB. AND THEN BORN INTO A STABLE WITH A BED OF STRAW. THIS LOVING ACT OF GOD TO LITERALLY BECOME ONE OF US AND TO NEED TOTAL CARE TO THRIVE FROM HUMANS LIKE MARY AND JOSEPH.

THE GOD WHO WANTS TO BE WITH US IS CALLING ALL OF US YE FAITHFUL ABLE TO LEARN HOW TO TRUST IN GOD'S CARE THROUGH THE CARE WE EXPERIENCE WITH EACH OTHER. EACH OF US EMBRACED AS WE ARE WITHOUT NEGATIVE JUDGMENT BEING IMPOSED, SIMPLY ACCEPTING US AS WE ARE WITH LOVE. AND THEREBY SLOWLY TEACHING US TO ACCEPT OURSELVES AS LOVE BY GOD THAT WE LOOK FORWARD TO MORE TIME OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH AS WE SHARE MARY'S LAP WITH THAT CHILD, JESUS. AND THEN GO FORTH FROM HERE PROCLAIMING JOY TO THE WORLD. THE ANGELS WILL HEAR US AND JOIN OUR SINGING TONIGHT. PEACE AND LOVE WILL FLOW FROM OUR HUMBLE CHESTER GATHERING AND SURROUND THOSE OUT IN THE COLD AND IN WARFARE IN UKRAINE. IT MAY FLOW FROM HERE TO THE HEARTS OF THOSE SEEMING TO US AS BEYOND GOD'S LOVE, LIKE VLADIMIR PUTIN.

BUT GOD SAYS TO US, IF I AM WILLING TO BE ONE WITH YOU AND YOU ACCEPT THAT, LOOK FOR PEACE TO COME. FIND

WAYS TO PRAY FOR PEACE TO COME. AND THEN FIND THAT
MESSAGE ISSUING FORTH AGAIN AS JOY TO THE WORLD.

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL TONIGHT.